

REAL ROMANCES OF THE BUSINESS WORLD

The Rise of the Singed Cat



BY RICHARD SPILLANE.

It does not matter particularly whether the foreman quit or got fired. He got separated from his job somehow, and Mrs. Harriet Hannis, owner, editor and chief contributor, had to get some one in his place, or the Christian Champion might not get out. A woman who invades the business realm, has much to contend with. This Mrs. Hannis had discovered long before, but she was one of those dynamic souls who had to be doing something for the general public all the time, and the Christian Champion acted as one vent for her energies. Usually when any one failed her she pitched in and did the work herself, but she could not get type, and she could not make up the "forms" of the paper, so she had to look for help. She had sought aid

from the editor of one of the great dailies of New York, and it was this editor who recommended David. Mrs. Hannis read the letter of the editor and then looked at David, and her heart sank. The letter said that David was a first-class printer and that he was just over from Scotland. That he was a first-class printer she had no doubt, but how could such a tiny, mangy human being be first-class at anything? When she looked at him she thought of a poor, singed cat. Hair grew on him as it does on a wire-haired terrier, only more irregularly. His clothes were poor and ill fitting, but that did not signify, for he would ruin the reputation of the most famous of tailors, just as he would disgrace the most talented of barbers. Nothing

would fit him or look becoming. Where hair did not grow about his face, freckles did. Mrs. Hannis, worried about her paper, disappointed in her hopes, sorry for herself and this poor immigrant, read the letters he had worked for and determined he would not do. The letters spoke well enough of him, but the man by his very manner spoke ill of himself. He was so mild of voice, so hesitant of speech, so insignificant, that he could fill a foreman's job, even if the foreman of the Christian Champion only bossed himself, one journeyman printer and the printer's devil.

Mrs. Hannis cleared her throat to tell him she was very sorry and so forth, and then in the goodness of her heart, she did not say it, but instead with grave misgivings she told him she would give him a trial. Whatever David Macgregor's shortcomings were they did not include lack of knowledge of typography. He had to stand on a box when he stuck type, but he was a fast and accurate compositor. He loved the business, too. Mrs. Hannis had noticed the immigrant's eyes. They were blue and clear—the one redeeming feature in his homely makeup. As she got to know the wee Scotchman better she got to think less of his size and his manginess and more of his eyes. There was not a lazy bone in his body. Once he got the hang of the shop he was able to set more out of the plan than any foreman Mrs. Hannis had employed. He delighted in doing an artistic bit of work. A well-set, attractive ad. had all the charm to him that a good painting has for an artist. The journeyman printer and the printer's devil, who had been inclined to scorn him at first, had come to recognize his ability as a craftsman, and his soft spoken orders were obeyed more faithfully than the loud and sometimes profane ones of his predecessor.

David had not been in the shop many days before he went tremblingly to Mrs. Hannis to borrow money. He had a wife and various children. They had come over with him in the steerage. He had rented a house and grounds out fifteen miles from the city. The rent was \$3 a month. The house was a tumble down shack, but it would cover his brood for the time being. But all his cash was exhausted.

Mrs. Hannis advanced enough to relieve the family's immediate needs. She was happy to do so, for one of her hobbies was to help deserving immigrants. This was the beginning. It was not long before Mrs. Hannis was busy keeping books. David never had a full week's wages coming to him. There always was something happening that necessitated the borrowing of money. Donald had a fever or Kathleen had to have shoes or Mr. Macgregor had given birth to another youngster or little David had fallen and broken his collarbone or Elsie needed a new dress. It always was something for the wife or children, never anything for himself. He wore the same rough clothes he had on the day he applied for work and the same coarse shoes. Half the time he slept in the shop at night that he might save the car fare it would cost to go home. He made a complaint of no one except Mrs. Hannis. Sometimes heaved his \$25, sometimes \$50. Once he almost got clear of debt, but something happened to set him back again. Occasionally Mrs. Hannis got tired of this chronic immovability, but David was a rare hand at borrowing and never failed to get what he asked.

It was a weird life David Macgregor led in those days. To feed the family was in itself a task. There were nine or ten children. Mrs. Macgregor, who was nearly six feet tall, did all the housework, sewing, mending, washing, ironing. David, to reduce the home expenses, cultivated the little patch of ground about the old shack, getting up at dawn such days as he was home to work in the garden. Such nights as he did not sleep in the shop he utilized to teach the children. He was passionately devoted to the little ones. No sacrifice on his part was too great for them. Recognizing their power over him, they took advantage of him in many ways but he did not care. If they pleaded for anything he was not happy until he provided it for them and heard their cries of delight. He was in distress when one of them was ill and rarely a week passed that some of them was not in need of a doctor. Year in and year out it was worry and starving for him. Nearly every year Mrs. Macgregor presented him with another son or daughter.

One day David went to Mrs. Hannis with a plea for an additional loan. "What is it for now, David?" she asked. "I want to buy an organ—a parlor organ," he replied. "Nonsense!" exclaimed the boss. "You have a hard enough time as it is without adding to your burdens with such a ridiculous thing as an organ. I wouldn't think of giving money to you for such a foolish purpose." But Macgregor, in his small voice and his halting way, told how lonely it was for the missis and the bairns sometimes and how the missis longed for an organ. She had an organ in her home in Scotland before she married Macgregor, and now and then spoke of it. Recently a man had been around selling organs on the installment plan. The man had mentioned it. She had not asked for it, but he knew her heart

was set on getting one. It would bring joy into her life, and she had such a dreary existence. It was work, work, work from morning until night for her. Young children need so much and are so helpless. And there is so much mending and washing to be done for them.

Mrs. Hannis tried to argue how much

more good the same amount of money

spent for clothing would do than if

put into an organ, but Macgregor could

only think of how the organ would

cheer up the missis, and Mrs. Hannis

finally advanced the amount he asked

for the first payment.

It was not a long time for good wages for

printers, and the Christian Champion

was not a gold mine by any means.

Macgregor might have earned more in

another shop, but it was doubtful if he

could get another job readily. Gen-

erally he seemed content. It did not

matter particularly how much heavier

became his burden, he did the best he

could, borrowed when he had to have

money and paid back as best he could.

For all his tiny appearance, he was

soundly healthy. What would have hap-

pened to that big family had it been

otherwise is unpleasant to contemplate.

The payments on the parlor organ

were almost ended and Macgregor was

looking forward to being really clear

of debt when suddenly he was

threatened with disaster. He went to

Mrs. Hannis one morning so upset that

he almost spoke as fast as an ordinary

person. His home—the house he had

lived in for all the years he had been

in this country—the house in which

several of his children had been born—

would be sold at public auction if he

did not buy it at once for \$600. He

had come to love the place. So had his

wife and the children. It would break

their hearts to leave it. Not only that,

but he had improved the land and the

house until the improvements represented

much to him. He had gotten the place

for \$5 a month because of its tumble-

down condition. Each year he had made

repairs and improvements with his own

hands until now the house was homey

and cozy. The garden, too, had been

brought up to a fine state of cultiva-

tion and the fruit trees had begun to

bear. No one could know how much

the loss of this house would mean to

him, and he begged Mrs. Hannis to

lend \$600 to him so he could buy the

place.

Mrs. Hannis, tender-hearted and sym-

pathetically as responsive as ever, told

him she did not have \$600 in the world

and she could not raise that much any

easier than she could raise \$5,000,000.

It was a difficult task, in fact, to keep

the paper going, and sometimes she

had to come high in the morning to

pay the wages of Macgregor and the other

men.

Macgregor, downcast for the first

time, went home that night without a

smile with which to greet the children.

But the next morning he was back in

the shop in his usual quiet, tenacious

humor, but on his brow was bent the

weight of his misfortune. He was

accompanied by his wife. She had

in her arms her last born, a girl two

weeks old. The wee man and his great,

tall wife invaded the office of Mrs.

Hannis. As the owner of the paper

looked at the woman she was more

and more reminded of how he had

appeared the first day he had come to

the shop. If anything, he looked more

singed than ever. He went over the

same ground he had traversed in his

appeal to her the day before, and as he

talked she became more and more

comfortable. It was not what he said

it was Mrs. Macgregor. She did not

say a word. She simply hugged the wee

baby to her breast and looked with her

big, pathetic eyes at Mrs. Hannis. There

was an appeal in those eyes that Mrs.

Hannis could not withstand. The baby,

too, wailed a bit just when Macgregor

was at the most touching part of his

story.

Mrs. Hannis loves babies. Most child-

less women do. The combination of

baby, mother and father was too much

for her, and she said she would do her

utmost to raise the money for them.

Like the ardent spirit that she is, Mrs.

Hannis did not delay. She went at

once to each man who she thought

might advance the money. He could

not spare it, but suggested she go to

the Rev. Mr. Burchard.

To the man whose "Rum, Romanism

and Rebellion" speech defeated James

G. Blaine for the presidency she hurried.

He listened to her narration and

did not show much interest. He seem-

ed cold and unresponsive, and she

thought the case was hopeless. The

prospect of defeat may have unnerved

her a bit. Maybe the tears came to

her eyes. Maybe she said something

that touched a sympathetic chord in

the clergyman's heart. Clergymen have

many stories of distress to listen to.

At any rate his manner changed a

trifle, and then he softened more and

more until finally she had his promise

of the \$600. Macgregor got the money,

purchased the house and land and

skipped and sailed as he never had

before. Within two years he paid back

the \$600, had his home free and clear

and was out of debt.

The Christian Champion continued

for some years and then passed out of

existence. Mr. Hannis, whose enthusi-

asm never waned, turned his attention

to another field of endeavor. Macgre-

gor plodded along as a printer for some

years and then managed to establish

a little printshop of his own. Occa-

sionally Mrs. Hannis heard of him.

He was making headway.

It was thirty years after the inci-

dent of the \$600 that Mrs. Hannis re-

ceived a letter from David Macgregor.

Her hair is silver now, but time has

dealt gently with her. She still is the

ardent, enthusiastic, helpful woman of

former days. In the letter Macgregor

asked her as a great favor to come to

his home and attend the wedding of

one of his daughters. He gave directions

as to the train by which she should

travel and said he would meet her at

the station. She went by the train he

specified and when she stepped from the

car, there was there to greet her. His

trunk suit was of the finest weave. On

his head was a silk hat. But clothes

could not change David Macgregor. His

hair was white, but every hair was as

whirly and bristly and unruly as of yore.

He escorted Mrs. Hannis across the

platform and helped her into a hand-

some automobile. The car sped away

through the streets and then out into

the country.

Then it turned into a beautiful road

and entered a charming estate, the en-

trance to which was marked by archi-

tural pillars. The approach to the house

was delightful. If a landscape gar-

dener laid out the grounds he did his

work well. The car turned in to a

porte cochere and Mrs. Hannis alighted.

At the door Mrs. Hannis was met by

Mrs. Macgregor. The tall, angular wo-

man of thirty years ago was now large

and imposing. There was no angu-

larly about her now. Far from it.

She was a bit shy of her visitor, per-

haps, for she is shy by nature, but her

pathetic look had gone from her eyes.

And then Mrs. Hannis had to meet the

children. They came forward in a

body. The eldest was past forty. The

youngest was thirty. She was in her

bridal robe. Thirty years before Mrs.

Hannis had heard her wail on her

mother's breast in the office of the

Christian Champion.

That wedding service was a wonder-

ful sight to Mrs. Hannis. There were

guests from far and near. There was

no ostentation, but everything bespoke

refinement, luxury and good taste. Mac-

gregor was an old figure as with tears

in his eyes, he gave away his daughter.

She was the last of his flock, and she

was leaving him now as the others had

in turn. At the wedding feast it was

beautiful to see the way the children

showed their devotion to the little man.

They still were children, even if they

were men and women with children of

their own. He must have the best

of everything. In a hundred ways

he showed a love and devotion diffi-

cult to describe.

After the bride and bridegroom had

gone and the guests had departed, Mac-

gregor showed Mrs. Hannis about his

beautiful home. In one corner of one

of the handsomest rooms she saw an

old-fashioned article.

"And what is this?" she asked.

"Ah!" said he. "Don't you know?"

"That is the parlor organ you helped me

buy over so long ago. It is one of our

greatest treasures. I would not part

with it for anything I possess."

That night in the family circle he

told, in his soft voice and halting man-

ner, a little about himself. Maybe, he

said, he had sacrificed a little for the

children, but if he had they repaid him

twenty-fold, fifty-fold, a hundred-fold.

He had struggled through the early

years to do all within his power for